stringent, providing for severe penalities against errant dealers and negligent officials.

Regulation of Prices of Petro-Products by Refineries

994. SHRI SITARAM KESRI: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that oil refineries have been given free hand to regulate prices of their petro-products;

(b) whether this would not result in competition by different refineries with regard to their products; and

(c) how far this would be beneficial to the consumers at large?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR GANGWAR): (a) Effective 1.4.98, the prices of the controlled products namely MS, HSD, SKO (PDS), LPG (Domestic) NGL and ATF are beign fixed by the Government. The pricing of all other petroleum products like Naphatha, FO, LSHS, Bitumen, Paraffin Wax etc. sold by the oil companies has been decontrolled.

(b) and (c) One of the objectives of the phased deregulation that has been undertaken is to ensure that consumers benefit as a result of the competition.

Availability of Natural Gas in Andaman Islands

995. PROF. RAM KAPSE: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the survey conducted in Andaman Islands has revealed that a stock of 1700,000 million cubic ft. natural gas is available in these islands; and

(b) if so, the steps taken by Government towards utilisation of this natural gas?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR GANGWAR): (a) Seismic surveys conducted in deep waters by Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) in the Andaman Sea area has indicated presence of gas hydrates and natural gas below it, in certain parts, based on special processing of data. This has to be confirmed by drilling of wells only after that quantity of gas can be estimated.

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above at this stage.

Performance of Oil Refineries

996. SHRI GOVINDRAO ADIK: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have assessed the performance of public/private sector oil refineries for 1997-98 in terms of the targets set by standard parameters;

(b) if so, the details thereof, refinery-wise and how does it compare with the corresponding earlier two years period;

(c) the reasons for failure to achieve the targets/low capacity utilisation etc;

(d) the details of progress achieved on private/public sector ongoing projects and extent of time and cost overruns witnessed during implementation, projects-wise alongwith reasons therefor; and

(e) the details of projects cleared during 1997-98 and major investment proposals awaiting clearance?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR GANGWAR): (a) and (b) The details of capacity utilisation, a standard important parameter of Public Sector/ Joint Venture Refineries during 1997-98, as compared to earlier two years *i.e.* 1996-97 and 1995-96 may be seen at *Annexure-I.* [*See* Appendix 184 Annexure No. 29]